

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A method for preparing a milk-based composition comprising a homopolysaccharide comprising the steps of

- (i) fermenting a mixture comprising milk and a fermentable sugar with a homopolysaccharide-producing microorganism under anaerobic conditions, and
- (ii) stopping the fermentation while the pH of the mixture remains within the range of above pH 5.5 5.7 and above to produce a fermented mixture,

the pH of the mixture being unregulated during fermentation.

2. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein the pH of the mixture remains within the range of pH 5.8 to 6.2 during fermentation.

3. (previously presented) A method according to claim 1 wherein the microorganism is a dextran- and/or fructan-producing lactic acid bacterium.

4. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein the microorganism is a lactic acid bacterium of the genus *Leuconostoc*.

5. (original) A method according to Claim 4 wherein the microorganism is a dextran-producing strain of *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* subspecies *mesenteroides* or subspecies *dextranicum*.

6. (original) A method according to Claim 5 wherein the microorganism comprises a strain selected from *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* subspecies *mesenteroides* ATCC 10830A, or *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* subspecies *dextranicum* 605.

7. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein the homopolysaccharide is produced in an amount of at least 0.3% by weight of the composition.
8. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 1 wherein the mixture is inoculated with beadlets comprising the microorganism.
9. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein the fermentation is carried out at a temperature of from 10° to 30°C.
10. (original) A method according to Claim 1 wherein the fermentation is carried out for a period of from 4 to 48 hours.
11. (currently amended) A method ~~according to Claim 1~~ wherein the fermented mixture prepared according to claim 1 is then diluted with a milk based non-fermented mixture.
12. (Canceled)
13. (Canceled)
14. (canceled)
15. (previously presented) The method according to Claim 1 wherein the pH of the mixture remains within the range of pH 5.7 to 6.2 during fermentation.